
Introduction

The Central Puget Sound is not the first North American region to tackle the issue of regional governance. Advances in transportation technology such as national highway systems and the tremendous growth of suburbs in the second half the 20th century created metropolitan networks that cross city and county lines. Because these metropolitan regions are governed by a fractured array of municipal and county governments that compete against one another for tax base inputs, addressing problems that cross jurisdictional boundaries has been a persistent challenge.

In 1953, the Greater Toronto Area became the first North American region to experiment with a formal regional government. The two-tier federated government implemented by the provincial legislature proved to be highly successful in its first 20 years, and served as the model for other regional experiments, including the Municipality of Metropolitan Seattle (“Metro”) system used in King County from 1958 to 1992.

Regionalism in transportation has taken several different forms in the United States and Canada, and there are probably as many different types of regional governance as there are regions. Criteria for characterizing, comparing, and evaluating regional governance systems have been suggested by commentators such as Larry S. Bourne, Anthony Downs, and Daniel Carlson. However, all three recognize that there is not a single superior form of regional governance; each region must select a system that works best with its unique challenges and assets.

This analysis compares the governance systems used by a sample of regions in Canada and U.S. The systems are compared along the following six criteria:

- **Whether Municipal Membership is Voluntary or Required**
Some systems are formed by a higher legislating authority that mandates participation (Portland, Toronto) while others are formed through voluntary associations of municipalities that coalesce in response to a strained transportation system (San Diego, Phoenix)
Trade-off: In general, voluntary associations tend to be more collaborative and popular, but have less binding authority when making difficult prioritizing decisions about scarce resources.
- **The Size of the Region**
Regional impacts of transportation vary depending on geography, density and demographics. Regional boundaries may be drawn narrowly to only incorporate single counties or central metropolitan centers (Charlotte,

Tampa-St. Petersburg), or they may be drawn more broadly across jurisdictional boundaries to capture both current and future impacts of regional growth.

Trade-off: Regional boundaries that are drawn too small may not be large enough to address regional issues and must be redrawn more frequently to accommodate growth. Regions that are too large struggle to address the service demands of urban, suburban and rural jurisdictions and can be politically unfeasible.

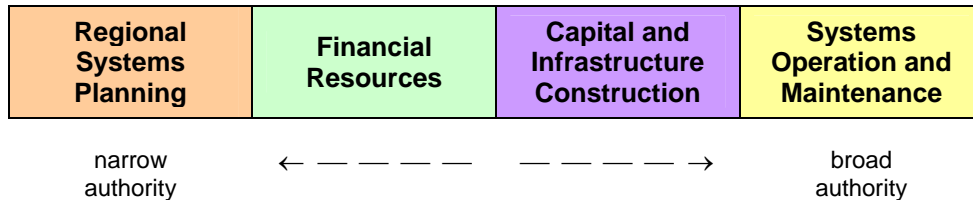
- **The Mode Responsibilities of the Authority**

Regional authorities can be formed to address roadway needs, transit needs, other multi-modal needs, or all of the above.

Trade-off: In general, regional transportation authorities that integrate roads and transit functions are best able to holistically evaluate and prioritize projects for the region (i.e. road and transit projects compete against each other for funding based on benefit to the regional system). However, regional roadway/transit authorities can have difficulty integrating diverse responsibilities.

- **The Transportation Functions of the Authority**

A regional transportation authority can be tasked narrowly with mere planning functions, or it can be given a broad mandate to plan, fund, build, and operate transportation amenities.



Trade-off: Consolidating more functions in a single regional authority improves transportation accountability and may improve coordination, but it also assigns dissimilar responsibilities to a single entity.

- **Land Use, Economic Development, and other Responsibilities**

Because transportation planning is intrinsically linked to land use decision-making, economic development, and other elements of regional growth, many commentators argue that these responsibilities should be integrated in a single authority.

Trade-off: In general, consolidating functions in a single authority allows for better coordination of transportation, land use and economic development objectives in project prioritization and funding, but it also concentrates a great deal of power in a single entity at the expense of municipal authorities and local interests.

- **Regional Authority Leadership**

Regional authorities can be governed by a directly-elected council, or a board of appointed municipal leaders. Elected council members may represent districts or the region at-large, though district-based representation must comply with constitutional “one person, one vote” provisions. Board decisions may be made by majority vote, supermajority vote, weighted vote, or some combination of the above. A board member’s term may be longer to encourage stability in regional planning and funding, or it may be shorter to promote responsiveness.

Trade-off: A directly elected governing board is more accountable to voters, but when facing a complex regional decision, an appointed board may be better insulated from political distractions, voter apathy, and/or ballot fatigue.

- **Revenue-Sharing or Sub-Regional Equity**

Metropolitan regions are fractured into municipal jurisdictions that compete with one another to attract tax base inputs. Because this system causes resource accumulation in some areas of the region and compounds resource deficiencies elsewhere, some commentators argue that regional systems should distribute resources to areas where they are most needed or where they will have the most regional benefit (Twin Cities, MN). Other commentators argue that the competition between jurisdictions improves municipal performance and that revenues should directly benefit the jurisdictions where they are collected.

Trade-off: Allocating resources according to need or maximum benefit (“resource-sharing”) can address some of the resource inequalities in a fractured region, but spending resources in the same jurisdiction (or “sub-region”) where they are collected ensures that regional investments are visible throughout the region in the short-term and can be politically popular.